

Focus Groups Round 1 Summary

January 2020

Overview of Content

- Overview and Context of Focus Groups
- Factors Influencing Travel Choices by Groups
- Takeaways from Group Discussions by Topic Area
 - Mobility Options
 - Streets
- Round 1 Lessons Learned

Focus Group Purpose

- Community-generated ideas from a diverse audience
- Ideas will be considered in context of other inputs and against the AMP Vision and Guiding Principles
- Recognition that these are a way to have an in-depth discussion, but may not be fully representative of the community
- A subset will be shared in upcoming citywide community engagement events to get broader feedback

Discussion Topics

- Round 1: Streets and Mobility Options (*Completed February/March 2020*)
- Round 2: Transit and Parking and Curbside Management (*Spring 2020*)



What mobility strategies will most impact your life for the better?

AMP Focus Groups – Round 1

January 2020

- AMPAC Meeting

February/March 2020

- In-Person meetings grouped by stage of life
 - 6 Meetings
 - ✓ 9 group discussions
 - ✓ 72 in-person total participants
- Online Discussion
 - 3 Online Groups
 - 43 Online Participants



AMP Advisory Committee (AMPAC)

- Reviewed preliminary material and participated in focus group discussion
- Provided feedback in preparation for outreach to community
- Key Takeaways
 - Importance of regional coordination
 - Ensure that equity is considered in decision making (i.e. paving schedule)
 - Improving the appeal of transit for professionals
 - Consider more than just the peak hour congestion
 - Weave best practices into the plan document chapters
 - Metro access is major concern for West End communities
 - How do we address trip chaining and different needs for each trip?
 - Need to incorporate concerns from the driver perspective that may not be vocal on the AMPAC

Preview of Major Themes

- Each age group had slightly different mobility considerations, but many **broader themes were largely consistent**
- Widespread concerns about **safety** and **congestion**
- Diverging approaches to addressing **cut-through traffic**
- Importance of **regional coordination**
- Consideration of **equity** and **disparate needs** in different parts of the City
- Need for **better transit**
- Importance of **networks**: bike, bus, auto
- Lack of **awareness** of existing tools and processes

Factors Influencing Travel Choices by Group

Participants were asked what factors influenced their travel choices to jumpstart the conversation, help us understand varying mobility needs and priorities, and get a basic understanding of personal mobility in each group

Ages 56-74

- Unsafe brick pavement or lack of sidewalks prevents walking
- Drive due to time that transit takes, need to make multiple stops, or carrying a load or shopping bags
- Safety concerns getting home late on transit
- Avoids peak periods and school bus pick-up/drop off times



Factors Influencing Travel Choices

Ages 41-55

- Destinations vary throughout region, need car
- Buses take too long and not a convenient option

Ages 18-40

- Chose to live near Metro
- Drive due to lengthy transit travel time and reliability of car
- Availability of car sharing/ridesharing and micro-transit options



Factors Influencing Travel Choices

T.C. Williams High School, Leadership Class - Ages 16-18

- Strong desire for license for independence
- Drive and carpool to school with classmates
- DASH bus primarily when free
- Scooters when available, but can get costly



Factors Influencing Travel Choices (online)

Persons with Disabilities or Limited Mobility

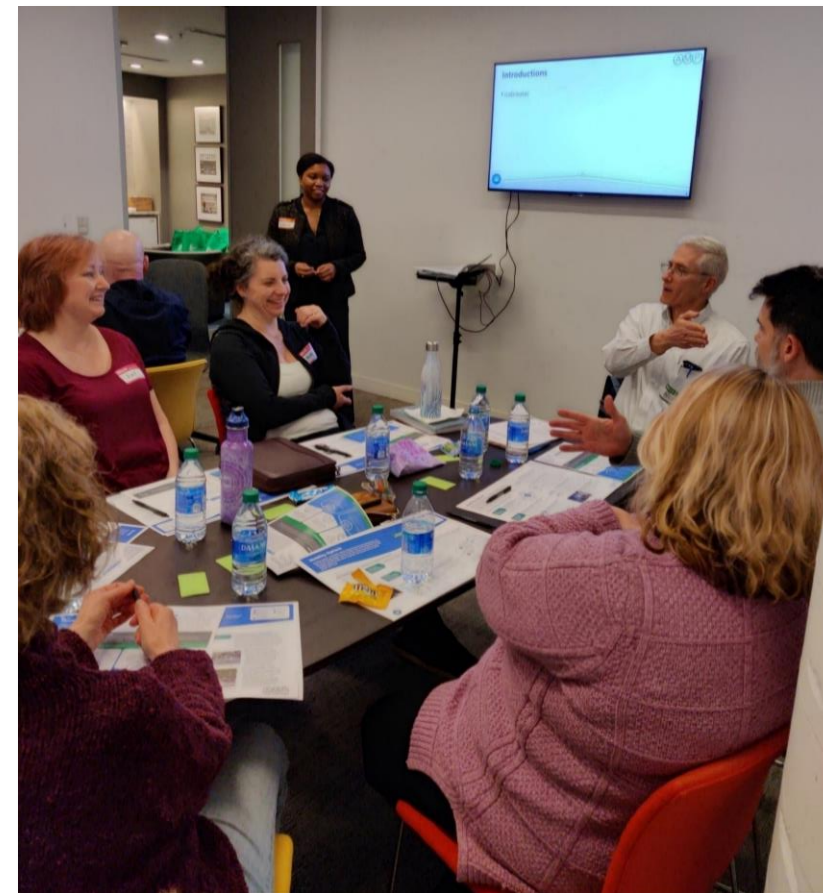
- Choices based on weather, distance
- Safety concerns when walking - Related to infrastructure (i.e. brick sidewalks)

Working Parents

- Safe bike routes and bike amenities at destination
- Carrying packages or kids – More likely to drive
- Walking/Metro - Avoid driving during peak hours
- Safety while traveling with younger kids

Community Champions / Business Community - Factors For Individuals They Serve

- Proximity to metro and availability of bus service
- Ownership or access to personal vehicle
- Rideshare used late at night when transit is less frequent



Factors Influencing Travel Choices

T.C. Williams High School, Liberty Promise (In Spanish) - Ages 18-25

- Overcrowding on school bus makes DASH an appealing choice
- Traffic congestion impacts transit reliability
- Limited access to personal vehicle
- Credit card payment option limits bikeshare usage - Desire alternative payment options



Takeaways From Group Discussions

Mobility Options: Summary of Themes Discussed by Group

Overview of Discussion			
	Generally Support	Opinions on Both Sides	Generally Did Not Support
Major Topic of Discussion			
Moderate Topic of Discussion			
Limited Discussion			

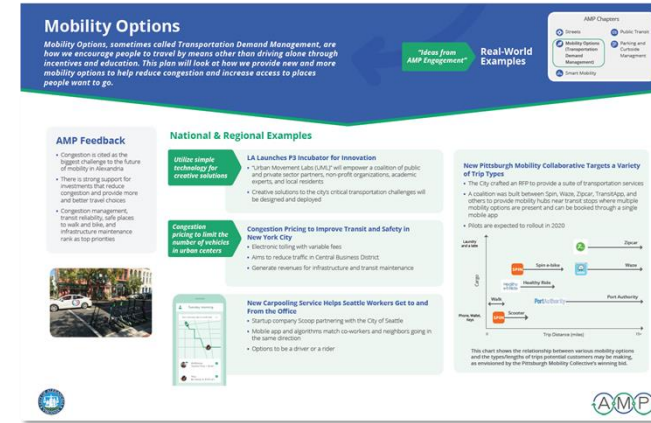
T.C Williams High School - Leadership Class	T.C Williams High School - Liberty Promise	Ages 20-40	Working Parents	Ages 40+	Ages 40+	55+ and Persons with Disabilities	55+ and Persons with Disabilities	Business Community / Community Champions	West End Coalition
21 participants*	6 participants	16 participants	13 participants	13 participants*	12 participants*	9 participants	9 participants	7 participants	15 participants
2/21/2020	3/13/2020	2-Week Duration	2-Week Duration	2/10/2020	2/13/2020	2/4/2020	2/12/2020	2-Week Duration	3/7/2020
In-Person	In-Person	Online	Online	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	Online	In-Person

Reoccurring Themes										
Support for More/Better Travel Choices										
Importance of Public Transit										
Dockless Mobility										
Awareness of Travel Tools and Options										
More Technology and Incentives										

*Participants were divided into two smaller groups.

Mobility Options – Major Takeaways

- **Awareness of GO Alex** was generally low; participants more aware of WMATA Smart Benefits. (All groups)
- Integrated apps or signs with **real-time information** gives users confidence in using alternative modes. (All Ages); Apps with **incentives** generated tremendous interest among high school students. (Ages 16-18)
- Varying opinions on **dockless scooters** and how the City should manage through policy such as incentives, more designated corrals, geofencing. (All groups)



- **Reliable buses** that are coordinated would generate more interest in alternatives to driving alone (All groups)
- Some interest in encouraging greater utilization of **carpooling**, but not often used (18+)

Mobility Options - Strategies Discussed

- Installation of "transit screens" or other real-time information
- On-demand transit for persons with disabilities / seniors
- Zero-fare transit pilot
- Ferry service expansion
- Dockless program improvements
- Local app showing mobility options with local incentives
- Regional partnerships to manage transportation demand
- Encouraging or creating telework opportunities
- Mobility hubs to enable seamless use of multiple modes
- Pilot A/V demonstration for designated route

Streets:

Summary of Themes Discussed by Group

Overview of Discussion			
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Moderate Topic of Discussion			
Limited Discussion			

T.C Williams High School - Leadership Class	T.C Williams High School - Liberty Promise	Ages 20-40	Working Parents	Ages 40+	Ages 40+	55+ and Persons with Disabilities	55+ and Persons with Disabilities	Business Community / Community Champions	West End Coalition
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Reoccurring Themes										
Congestion										
Cut-Through Traffic										
Safety Concerns										
Bicycle Network Continuity										
Street Design to Address Safety / Cut-Through										
Coordination of Maintenance Schedules										

*Participants were divided into two smaller groups.

Streets – Major Takeaways

- Robust discussion around the **aggressive driving culture** (speeding, running red lights, not yielding to pedestrians) leading to pedestrian safety concerns. Need for enhanced **enforcement** and greater use of **physical safety improvements** to address safety concerns and motorists not obeying law (All groups)
- Traffic calming and **local cut-through traffic** were a major topics of discussion. Suggested strategies varied from passive measures to reduce speeds to more direct measures to prevent cut-through. Some concerns about inconvenience to locals (Ages 41+)
- **Support for prioritizing routes/streets by mode** to help set expectations and ensure there are complete networks (Ages 41+)



Streets - Strategies Discussed

- "Low Cost, Tactical Urbanism Solutions / Flexibility(Signs, Pavement Markings, etc.)"
- Local Resident Permit Program
- Turn Restrictions
- Education / Culture of Safety / Signage
- Enhanced Enforcement
- Evaluate Speed Limit with Street Design
- Leading Pedestrian Intervals and RRFBs
- Stop Signs / Stop Bars Placed Further Back from Crosswalks
- Pedestrian-Scale Street Lighting
- Prioritize Different Modes on Different Streets
- Smart or Coordinated Traffic Signals
- Dedicated Bus Lanes / Transit Priority to Ease Congestion
- Green Streets / Green Infrastructure / Low-Impact Design
- Coordinated Roadway Maintenance Schedules

Lessons Learned & Next Steps

Lessons Learned from Round 1 Focus Groups



In-Person Discussions:

- Participants appreciated background presentation and majority of time focused on smaller group discussions
- Positive feedback on facilitation and opportunity for everyone to participate
- All participants were respectful and felt as if their opinions were heard
- Positive feedback on the approach; Helpful having city staff speak to city-initiatives and highlight programs in response to specific questions



Lessons Learned from Round 1 Focus Groups



Online Focus Groups:

- Participants generally liked the flexibility to participate as their schedule allowed; Facilitator-prompted questions/responses were appreciated
- Challenging to get some users to re-engage after initial visit to platform
- Designated times for more “chat-like” discussions was suggested; Consider a window of time or “office-hours” to encourage more participation at set time

Overall

- Challenging balancing demographics across the focus groups



Focus Groups Round 2 Summary

March 2020

Focus Groups: Round 2



March 2020

- AMP Advisory Committee Online Discussions

April-May 2020

- Online Discussions
 - 3 groups **based on geography (East/Central/West)**
 - 14 active participants (45 participants invited)



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Danielle-Facilitator ▾

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AMP East Alexandria Focus Group



Welcome to the **East Alexandria** focus group for the Alexandria Mobility Plan! We thank you for offering to participate in these important discussions.

The objective of this second round of focus groups is to get specific ideas and suggestions for strategies that the City should pursue related to **Public Transit** and **Parking & Curbside Management**. *Previous focus group meetings on other topics (Mobility Options and Streets) were held in February 2020.*

Please reference the **AMP Fact Sheet**, linked in the Document Library on the right side of this page, for additional overall aspects of the project.

Before beginning participation in our discussion forums, please take a few minutes to review the **Overview Presentation**, linked in the Document Library on the right side of this page. This presentation provides important information on the AMP plan, schedule, and vision, as well as the ground rules for these online focus group discussions.

The ground rules for discussion are simple and include the following:

- Treat each other with respect
- Listen and comment as an ally, not an adversary. Everyone should feel comfortable expressing their opinion regardless of differences
- Ask for clarification, don't assume you know what someone means
- Do not characterize other people's views in or outside a group's meetings

Documents

- [AMP Fact Sheet \(304 KB\) \(pdf\)](#)
- [Overview Presentation - Round 2 Focus Groups \(2.16 MB\) \(pdf\)](#)
- [Public Transit - Example Strategies \(3.68 MB\) \(pdf\)](#)
- [Parking and Curbside Management - Example Strategies \(691 KB\) \(pdf\)](#)



AMP Advisory Committee (AMPAC)

- Reviewed preliminary material and participated in focus group discussion platform
- Provided feedback in preparation for outreach to community
- Key Takeaways
 - Ensure that **equity** is considered in decision making
 - Improve parking garage **signage via technology**
 - A **mobile application for parking** may not be a “game changer”
 - Prioritize strategies based on **sustainability**
 - Need for more **short-term parking spaces** in commercial districts
 - **Fewer – but better – bus stops** may attract transit riders
 - Consider **occasional transit users** (i.e. pedestrians and cyclists that shift to transit during severe weather)
 - Consider **Toronto’s King Street Transit Pilot** as an example of how to implement bus priority

Focus Group Discussions: Preview of Major Themes

Each geographic group had slightly different mobility considerations, but many broader themes were largely consistent

- Widespread concerns about **safety, transit reliability, and parking availability**
- Diverging suggestions to address **transit improvements**
- Importance of **transit frequency** and **reliability**
- Need for **safe walking routes** to transit, **first- and last-mile** solutions, and **real-time information**
- No clear preference of **parking payment** methods (app vs. meter)
- Lack of interest in **parking value pricing** or **reservation systems**

Difference in Opinion by Geographic Group

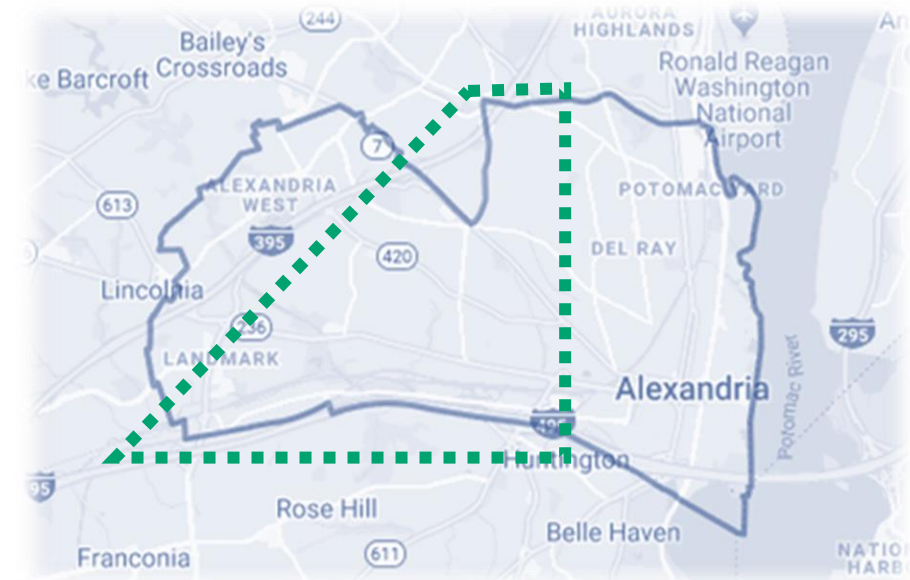
Public Transit – West Alexandria

- Lack of sidewalks and crosswalks at bus stops create **safety hazards**
- **Infrequency of service** does not make opting for transit easy, timely, or convenient
- Most **opt to drive** due to time that transit takes, multiple stops, destinations being outside of Alexandria, or carrying a load (i.e. shopping bags)
- **Lack of support for bus priority** on streets – concern that such treatments would negatively impact vehicle operations



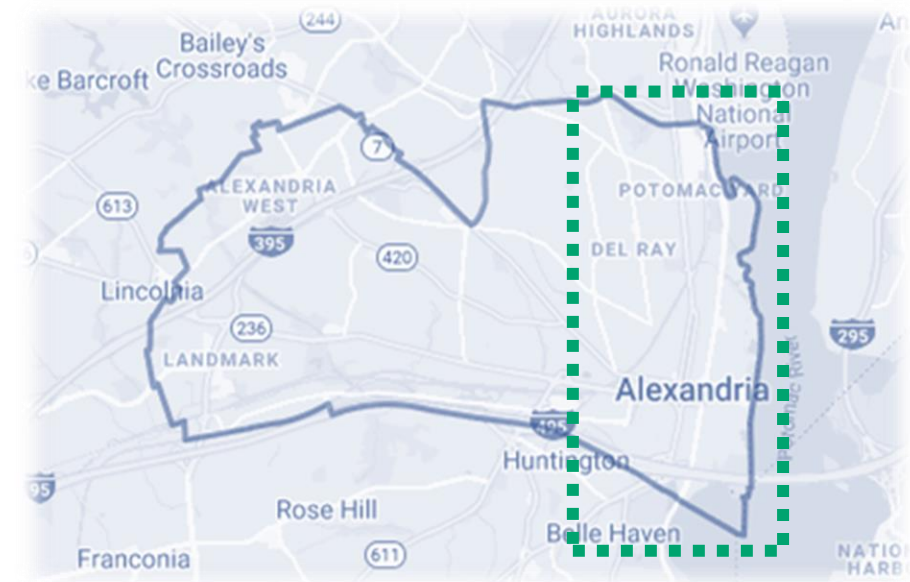
Public Transit – Central Alexandria

- Mixed opinions on **Vision Zero / Complete Streets improvements** (i.e. Seminary Road) that make bus stops more safe, accessible, and easier to get to and from
- **Infrequency of service** during off-peak hours and weekends presents a challenge
- Concern for recent **reductions in bus service** (North Ridge)
- Support for the **Transit Vision Plan** recommendations



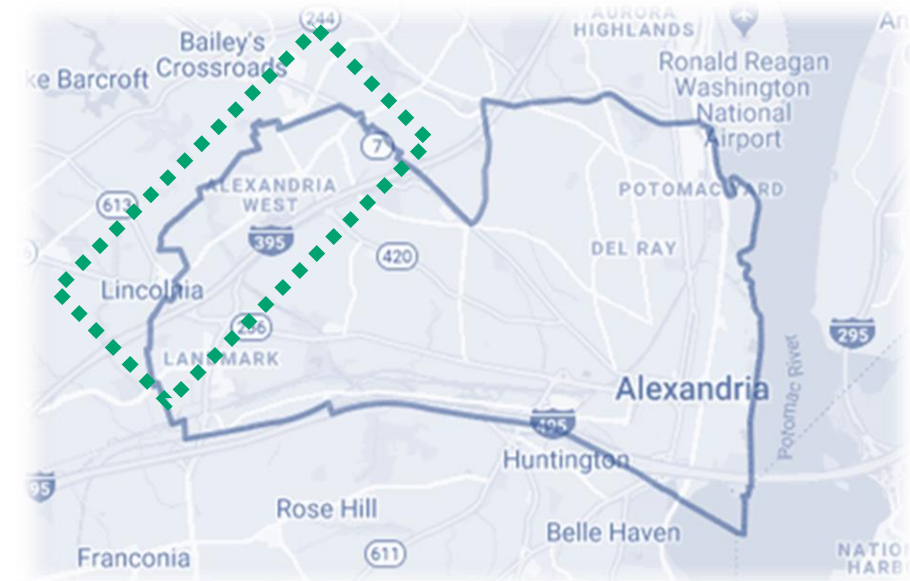
Public Transit – East Alexandria

- General support for bus priority on streets
- Support for Vision Zero / Complete Streets improvements (i.e. Leading Pedestrian Intervals) that make bus stops more safe, accessible, and easier to get to and from
- Support for micromobility devices (shared bikes and scooters) for first-/last-mile trips
- Support for Water Taxi service
- Desire for the transit system to be less commuter-focused



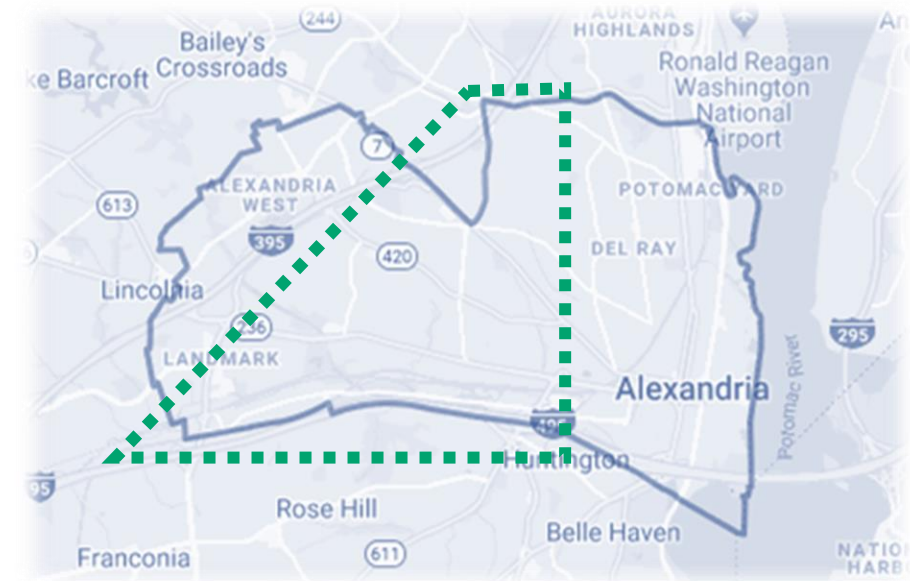
Parking & Curbside Management – West Alexandria

- Parking availability is **not perceived as an issue** in this area
- **Garage parking** is generally preferred to street parking
- General support for **curbside management**
- General opposition to the idea of **shared parking** on a citywide scale



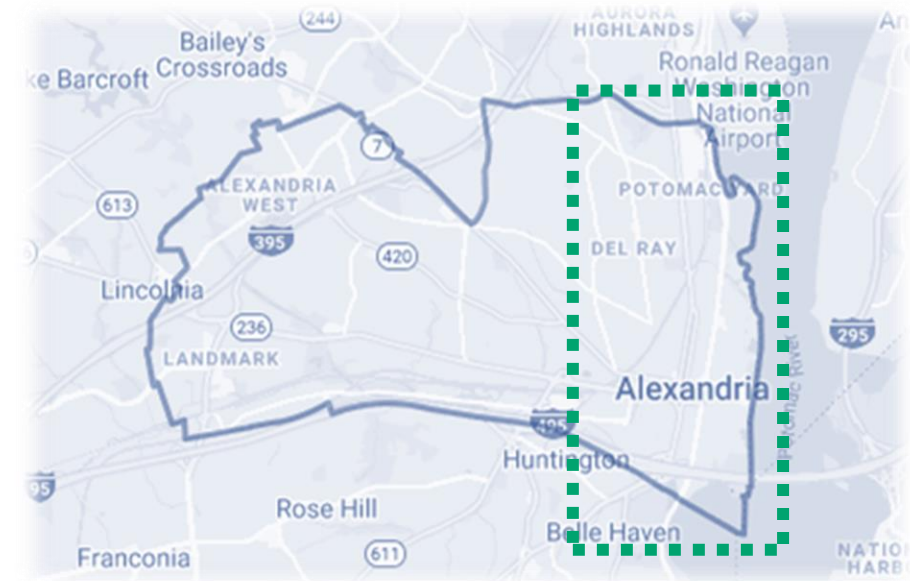
Parking & Curbside Management – Central Alexandria

- Some participants **opt for transit, bike, or rideshare** when parking is expected to be limited/difficult at their destination
- **Bike parking:** difficult to find in many areas
- **Garage parking** is generally preferred to on-street parking



Parking & Curbside Management – East Alexandria

- **Parking availability is a prominent issue**
- Concern that employees and visitors/tourists put a **strain on on-street parking** for residents
 - Support for **incentivizing garage use** for non-residents
- **On-street parking** is generally preferred to garage parking by residents
 - Support for more **residential-only on-street parking**
- Support for **allocating curbspace** based on land use



Themes, Major Takeaways, and Ideas

Public Transit – Themes & Major Takeaways

- Bus stop improvements (i.e. **shelters, seating, lighting**) would improve the transit experience and **attract new riders**
- Integrated **apps and/or signs with real-time information** are in high demand and would give users confidence in opting for transit
- The perceived **lack of on-time performance** of transit deters choice riders
- Less service and shorter spans of service during **off-peak hours and weekends** limits use of transit
- Support for **mobile/app-based ticketing platform**
- Transit trips that require **transfers are a deterrent** for choice riders
- Varying opinions on first- and last-mile solutions like **dockless scooters** and how the City should manage them
- Concern for effects of **bus stop balancing** on disabled and elderly passengers



Ideas Discussed

Better/wider **sidewalks and crosswalks** at or near bus stops

Enhanced bus farebox abilities

- *Ability to activate SmartTrip card reloads*
- *Acceptance of contactless credit/debit cards*

Peak-hour **bus lanes** and **electric bus rapid transit**

More **off-sidewalk parking for bikes/scooters** near transit stops

Parking & Curbside Management – Themes and Major Takeaways

- Preferences for payment methods vary (**mobile/app-based payments vs. traditional parking meters**)
- Little-to-no interest in **shared parking, parking reservation systems, or parking value pricing**
- Support for **real-time** information
- New approaches such as **curbside management** are perceived as less necessary/applicable in western areas – greater interest shown in eastern areas
- Availability of **parking is more strained in eastern areas of city**
- General interest in alternatives to driving and parking, but **opting for transit can be a challenge**
- Concern for **freight/delivery issues and enforcement**

Ideas Discussed

Priority curbspace for **wheelchair parking/loading**

More **bicycle, moped, and motorcycle** parking

Old Town as an appropriate geography for **curbspace prioritization**

- *Pick-up/drop-off and delivery/loading zones*
- *Expanded pedestrian space and street trees/landscaping*

Real-time garage parking availability information

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned



- Participants generally liked the organization of information and flexibility to participate as their schedule allowed
- Facilitator-prompted questions/responses were appreciated
- Challenging to get some users to re-engage after initial visit to platform
- Greater activity during designated “open forum” times where facilitators were on-hand to provide real-time responses and follow-up questions

18 days ago

Alert moderator

I don't have a realistic transit option for my daily commute, so I need to drive. However, during evenings and weekends, the lack of regular transit options decreases appeal. Buses into DC don't run on weekends. Metro trains come only every 20-30 minutes on weekends and usually involve track work. On top of that, it takes time and planning to get to the station. The lack of connectivity and time it takes to overcome it, isn't worth it. When I do take metro, I always use their website to check for the arrival/departure times of trains. That's helpful because the posted schedules are pretty useless.

Reply

Do you agree?  1 

Hide reply (1) ^

14 days ago

Alert moderator

I agree with that a bus from Alexandria into DC especially on the weekends would be very useful. During last summer when the Blue and Yellow lines both weren't usable the altered 11Y bus was an incredible boon. In the summer the water Taxi is a nice option. I also strongly agree that evening and weekend are a very weak point. I think that we should be looking to have a "transit system" not a "commuter system"

Reply

Do you agree? 